

# *Report*

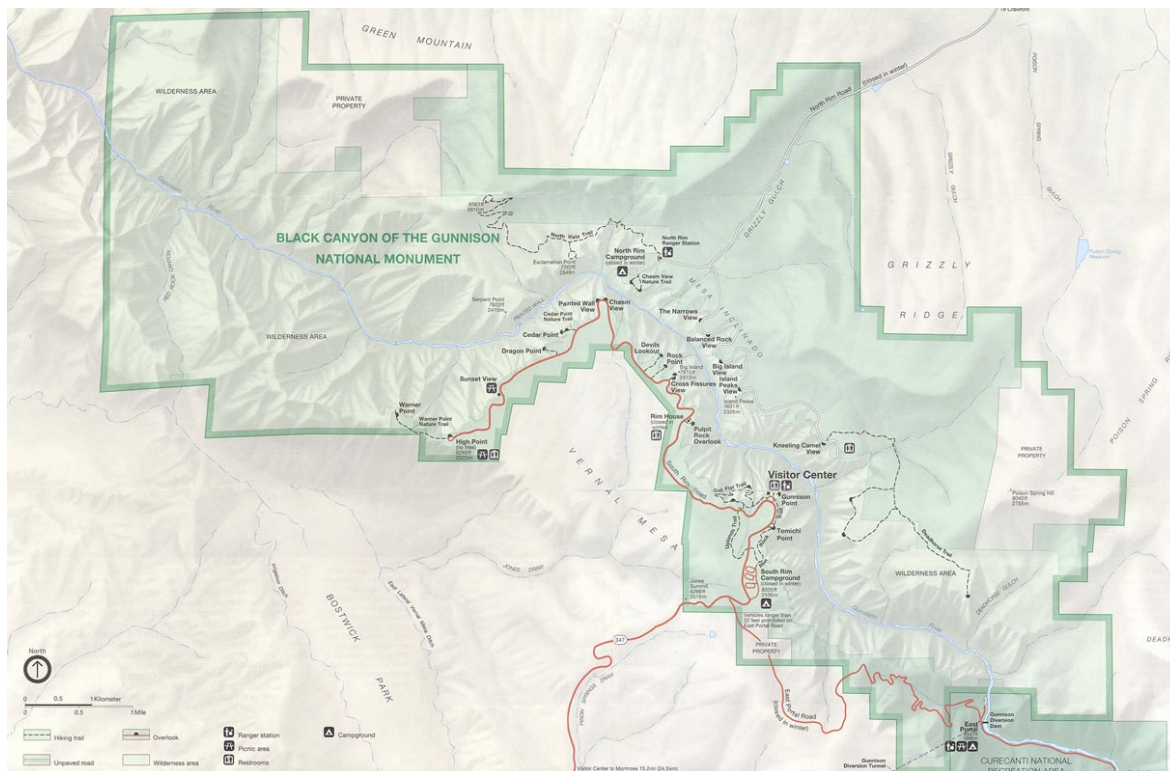
# Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, located near Montrose, Colorado, was established as a National Monument in 1933, and was redesignated as a National Park in 1999. Its unique and spectacular landscape was formed slowly by the action of water and rock scouring down through hard Proterozoic crystalline rock. No other canyon in North America combines the narrow opening, sheer walls, and startling depths offered by the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Figure 1 shows a map of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park contains a South Rim and a North Rim. Most park activity occurs on the South Rim. It includes the following:

- A 2,700-square-foot Visitor Center located at Gunnison Point. It includes information on current activities and accessible facilities. Exhibits explain the history, flora and fauna, and geology of the park. It was constructed in 1998 and is open year-round.
- The South Rim Campground. Now a 103-space campground, it is being rebuilt to 70 to 80 sites to accommodate large recreational vehicles (RVs). The campground is closed in winter.
- An 860-square-foot concession facility located at Pulpit Rock. This includes gifts and food, and is open for lunch between May and September.
- An eight-bedroom apartment building, maintenance facilities, and office space adjacent to the South Rim Campground.
- South Rim Road. This paved road provides access to numerous overlooks and hiking trails into the canyon. Beyond the Visitor Center, South Rim Road is not plowed of snow between December and Easter weekend, and access is allowed for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.
- Paved road access via SH-347 from U.S. 50 and East Portal Road, which accesses the adjacent Curecanti National Recreation Area. SH-347 is open year-round and East Portal Road is closed in winter. Via SH-347, U.S. 50 is seven miles from the Visitor Center, and via SH-347 and U.S. 50, Montrose is 15 miles from the Visitor Center. SH-347 has a grade that ranges between six and eight percent throughout much of its length.

**Figure 1. Black Canyon of the Gunnison**

The North Rim (closed in winter) includes a ranger station, campground, and gravel road access to overlooks and hiking trails. Montrose County Road F-74 provides access to and from Crawford, Colorado. This road is partially paved and partially gravel, and is closed in winter.

Projected annual visitation for 1999 for Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is approximately 210,000 persons. Visitation has remained fairly constant since 1976. Peak visitation months are May through September. There are no identifiable peak days, although Tuesday tends to have less visitation than other days of the week. Currently, the typical visitor stay is four hours, up from two hours in the 1970s.

The current General Management Plan was written in 1996. It does not discuss transportation issues. No recent transportation studies or recommendations have been made for Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

Current transportation problems identified by Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park staff include:

- Inadequate supply at all parking locations;
- Traffic congestion along South Rim Road; and
- Difficulties for large RVs to drive up the steep grade on SH-347. Some end up having to turn around (also difficult) and drive back down, missing the park altogether.

Two identified recreation issues by park staff are general traffic noise and visual impacts of light-colored RVs. Traffic noise detracts from visitors' enjoyment of the park's natural sounds, such as the river running through the canyon below. The sight of light-colored RVs on one rim detracts from visitors' views from the opposite rim.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are no existing Alternative Transit Systems (ATS) at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Potential ATS needs identified include:

- A shuttle system along South Rim Road; and
- A shuttle system between approximately the U.S. 50/SH-347 intersection and attractions along South Rim Road.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The potential ATS identified above would have the following benefits:

- A shuttle system along South Rim Road would help alleviate congestion along this road and the need for additional parking. The construction of additional parking spaces would be detrimental to park natural resources. Also, it would help alleviate adverse noise and visual impacts.
- A shuttle system between the U.S. 50/SH-347 intersection and attractions along South Rim Road would help alleviate the problems identified above, plus provide ATS for persons in large RVs attempting to drive up SH-347.

The benefits of either of these potential ATS would need to be weighed against capital and maintenance costs of the systems, and resource issues involving the operation and maintenance of the ATS.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument Official Map and Guide. National Park Service. 1996.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument annual visitation data. National Park Service Web Site. November 10, 1999.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park Digital Map. National Park Service Web Site. November 16, 1999.

Fax from Steve Riley. November 17, 1999.

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Steve Riley, Chief of Maintenance, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Telephone conversation. November 10, 1999.

Steve Riley. Telephone conversation. November 17, 1999.